

December 2004

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Recommended Citation

Miller, Heather S. (2004) "Books and The Internet: Buying, Selling and Libraries," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 16: Iss. 6, Article 10.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4437>

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Books and The Internet: Buying, Selling and Libraries

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It is no secret that the advent of the Internet has brought numerous opportunities and challenges to all involved in the creation and maintenance of library collections — publishers, purveyors of the materials that libraries collect and librarians themselves.

At the **2004 Charleston Conference**, one discussion focused on a single aspect of this immense topic — buying and selling printed books over the Internet. Five panelists (two booksellers, one publisher and two librarians) presented their views of this phenomenon. Understandably, all noted that the Internet had caused changes in their work and all cited both pros and cons. No doubt other publishers, booksellers and librarians would have more to add to the discussion, but this group raised points that seem generally applicable.

The panel consisted of **Rhonda Herman**, Executive Vice President, **McFarland & Company**, Publishers; **Bill Kane**, Regional Sales Manager, **Alibris**; **Brian Buckley**, Vice President, Professional Sales & Marketing, **Barnes & Noble**; **Sherman Hayes**, University Librarian, **William Madison Randall Library, UNC Wilmington**; and **Nancy Gibbs**, Head, Acquisitions Dept., **Duke University**. According to **Herman**, publishers find the Internet a useful marketing tool and frequently send notices of new publications to librarians via email. Some provide their catalogs on the Web and/or in PDF format. In terms of actual sales, publishers continue to view vendors as the source of services that libraries want but publishers cannot reasonably provide such as approval plans and cataloging. There has been a long-standing and successful culture created in which vendors and publishers each have a role to play and neither benefits from undercutting the other. At the same time, publishers have increasingly provided means for libraries to purchase materials directly from them over the Internet, largely because of customer demand.

For publishers, this is a two-edged sword. Given the ubiquity of the Internet, there is an expectation that every publisher will have a Web presence and permit a user-friendly interface.

This is an added expense and a new area of endeavor. The publisher also must pay credit card fees and manage far more accounts with different entities. It may not be possible to track library orders separately from orders placed by individuals. On the upside, publishers receive payment more quickly and they are in more direct contact with at least part of their markets. Libraries have the benefit of being able to check availability in several sources. A book that might be out of stock at a vendor may be available from the publisher.

Booksellers such as **Barnes and Noble** and **Alibris**, which were not traditional library book vendors, also have learned to deal with the library market, the former as a bricks and mortar bookstore that expanded onto the Internet and the latter as an Internet only bookseller. **Buckley**, of **Barnes and Noble**, noted that in ten years, online consumer book sales have grown to \$3.4 billion. Libraries have followed suit and booksellers have learned to cater to their needs, offering competitive prices, large selection, purchase order accounts and fast, often free, delivery. He also pointed out that more and more public librarians use consumer Websites in collection development activities, reviewing prices, sales rankings and bibliographic information. That clearly extends to reviews and commentary as well. Libraries have continued to increase their use of online booksellers, especially for "rush" and hard-to-find items. Libraries enjoy the benefit of a large selection, good prices and speed. **Barnes and Noble** is even investigating additional library services such as processing, cataloging, standing orders and integration with ILS vendors. If this progresses, lines will blur further between what librarians like to call "traditional" book vendors and consumer stores such as **Barnes & Noble**.

Kane, of **Alibris**, noted widespread expectations of speed among customers of all kinds in all kinds of markets. Libraries see this in their clientele and in turn expect it of booksellers. **Alibris**, selling only via the Internet and specializing in providing hard-to-find books and media, has found a market among libraries by

supplying many things

in small quantity to many customers. It is not a high volume or a high profit business, but it fosters precisely the

kind of relationship that characterizes the Internet, where every customer receives equally high attention from the bookseller.

It is not only booksellers who have taken advantage of the possibilities of the Internet. In many ways, libraries have driven the development of Internet-based book selling, requesting many of the same kinds of services from Internet suppliers as they have long received from traditional library book sellers. One of the primary hurdles for libraries in the early days of the Internet was the necessity of purchasing by credit card rather than using a purchase order and receiving invoices tailored to their specific needs. This frustration has eased as some booksellers have established means of dealing with library purchase orders, and more and more libraries have been able to obtain credit cards for acquisitions use.

The Internet has proven to be every bit as much a wonderland for librarians seeking materials for collections as it has for the everyday shopper who can find just about anything he or she can imagine on the Internet with comparison shopping thrown in as well. Thus, locating and purchasing obscure, even rare, materials can be done at one's PC. For librarians comparison shopping covers more than price because availability and condition are also very important to libraries, as are speed of ordering and delivery.

Both **Gibbs** and **Hayes** spoke of the many advantages accruing to libraries from the ability to purchase materials online. Most libraries who have tried this purchase method are aware that there are both pros and cons. **Gibbs** noted that postage can be expensive, purchasing statistics are not provided, there are many more vendors to deal with and to set up in the ILS, and vendors may not keep their stock information up to date.

Probably most libraries do some online ordering, but I wonder how many have gone as far as **UNC Wilmington** where enthusiasm runs very high. It was clear from **Hayes'** comments that **UNC Wilmington** has shifted most of its acquisitions purchasing to the Internet. By purchasing fully 70% of books and media online using a credit card, **UNC Wilmington** has been able to reduce costs, save staff time and increase speed. They buy both used and new books online and have been able to find items for Special Collections that would never even have been identified just a few years ago. Many persons in the library, including the Director himself, use the credit card in this way. As **Hayes** put it, "The vendor doesn't care who you are if you have a credit card!" (I was reminded of the often quoted cartoon "No one knows you're a dog on the Internet.") **Hayes'** enthusiasm contrasted with the more conservative approach many libraries have taken toward online purchasing, and I think he has it right. His library's collection has benefited enormously, not just because the Internet exists, but because of the bold way in which **UNC Wilmington** has chosen to use it.


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developed with industry standards and metadata protocols. These interfaces will support interaction models that fit the unique requirements of their patrons for knowledge synthesis through interactive and accessible direct manipulation.

Attempts to develop such interfaces are on

the way, but workable solutions for this significant challenge may take some time to realize. In the meantime, collection developers should be aware of the inherent ties between the collection and its user interface and seek an active role in guiding the development and future direction of the user interfaces serving their collections. An investment in the tip of the iceberg now can save the entire collection from sinking into invisibility. 

Plagiarism, Googling, and the Mouse: Is The Internet Killing Our Ability To Do Research?

A Presentation to the 24th Annual Charleston Conference

by William M. Hannay¹ (Partner, Schiff Hardin LLP) <whannay@schiffhardin.com>

One morning, a couple of weeks ago, my wife called our local high school looking for our son, who is a Junior. He needed to see a doctor about a (fortunately, minor) health problem. It turned out that there was an opening in the doctor's schedule that morning, so she was trying to find him quickly. Well, to make a long story short, everybody was playing "Where's Waldo?" but nobody could find our son. It wouldn't have been like him to ditch school, but where was he? People got worried. Finally, he appeared of his own accord, and the answer proved to be that he had been in the school library. It was — and this is the take-off point for my remarks today — the last place anybody thought to look. The surprise came, not because young William is a bad student, but because "everybody" knows that "nobody" at Barrington High goes to the school library anymore.

Certainly the notion that "nobody" uses our high school library is an overstatement, but I don't think it's that much of an exaggeration. And I don't think that this phenomenon is unique to our local High School. My sense is that it is a phenomenon repeated at secondary schools throughout the United States, and increasingly at colleges and even graduate schools. When "they" say that nobody goes to the school library anymore, what "they" mean is that students are not using library books anymore to do research. Students are allowed by their teachers, even encouraged to substitute on-line "research" for the more traditional process of delving into, for example, hard-cover histories or biographies, books of literary criticism, or monographs on the social sciences. Indeed, I'll tell you frankly I don't know what my son was doing in the library because I seriously doubt that he has ever learned how to do research there. I suspect he was just looking for a quiet place to

get some homework done. Nothing wrong with that, of course, but there's a lot more that libraries offer to the intellectual process than just a lack of noise. And I worry that, as a society, we are developing a generation of students who don't know how to do "book" research.

This summer, I read about an online survey conducted by the **Electronic Publishing Initiative** at **Columbia University** in New York. The study concluded that electronic resources have become the main tool for university students gathering information.² Here's the principal findings of the survey:

- 99 percent of student respondents said that they were far more dependent on electronic resources than print resources for their schoolwork.
- The results show that undergraduate students, in particular, are heavily dependent on the Web.
- When going online to do work for a course, undergraduate students are more likely to use an Internet search engine (46.5 percent) than to go to a library-sponsored electronic resource (21.9 percent) by a factor of more than two-to-one. Graduate students are more likely to use library-sponsored electronic resources, however.
- Finally, while the physical library is still an important destination for students to retrieve articles and books, undergraduates are more likely to use the library as a study space, for the computing facilities, or for Internet access.

Commenting on the significance of the survey, **Kate Wittenberg**, director of **Columbia's Electronic Publishing Initiative** said: "students' research habits, and their preference for

using **Google** and

other search engines as their first stop rather than the library, is part of a more general cultural and social change and I am not sure that there is much that libraries, or anyone else, can do to change this pattern."³

I hope that this assessment is wrong, and that we can change the pattern of increasing dependence on **Google** and other search engines as the principal research tool for students. For it seems to me that there are at least three serious academic flaws that flow from this situation. First, reliance on Web browsing feeds an unwholesome tendency towards what one commentator has called "passive learning and grazing for information," rather than an active and questioning search for truth. Second, relying only on the Web denies students access to the vast majority of useful knowledge, for the simple fact is that the millions of pages of information on the Internet represent only a tiny percentage of the disciplined thought and writing available in books. Third, Web-based research provides students no guideposts or framework for analyzing the importance, acceptance, or even veracity of the information they electronically stumble across. (Is some unknown person's BLOG, for example, a valid and worthwhile authority to cite in a paper ... in the same league as peer-reviewed journals or well-recognized treatises?)

Moreover — and I come now to the main issue I want to discuss with you — it is undeniable that the Internet has become the single greatest tool for academic dishonesty ever made available to high school and college students. With a well-chosen **Google** search and a few clicks of that devilish little Mouse, a student can find and download portions of articles or even whole term papers and pass them off as his own. Plagiarism is not new, but it used to be a physically harder crime to commit when you had to write it all out by hand if you wanted to copy. The increasing tendency of students to resort to the electronic form of cheating has been monitored in the past few years by several academics. One of the better known scholars in this area is **Rutgers** professor **Donald McCabe**, the founder of the **Center for Academic Integrity** at **Duke University**.

Prof. McCabe reports, for example, that, in a survey of 14,000 college students at 23 schools, more than one in five students admitted to cheating on a test in the past year.⁴ Moreover, according to **McCabe**, the fastest growing form of cheating is taking information from the Internet and passing it off as the student's own work. See *Chicago Sun-Times*, July 25, 2004, p. 16. While ten percent of college students admitted to Internet plagiarism in 1999, that number rose to around forty percent in 2003,

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This is not to say that there is no downside to online purchasing. There are certainly the problems noted above, changes to individual jobs which may not be well received, shifting and sometimes increasing workload, as well as a host of issues worthy of consideration by librarians and others in the bookselling business.

Not the least of such issues is the effect of all of this on traditional library book vendors. They were not represented on this panel, but it is undeniable in my opinion that every one of them has felt the effects of online bookselling by non-traditional book sellers. They have been given a new cast of characters with which to compete and somewhat different criteria to re-

spond to. Speed and availability have risen much higher on the list of library "must haves" than they once were. Traditional vendors have had to provide their own online inventory and ordering systems and have sometimes found that they were roundly criticized for the clumsiness of their first efforts. Library loyalty has slipped as libraries have found, once a credit card was in hand, much greater inventory, lower prices and sometimes free shipping online. Booksellers like these as well as the libraries they serve have lacked the nimbleness that characterize Internet-based businesses, but both are learning. It seems inevitable that the nimblest, most inventive, most savvy Internet-based bookselling and buying and the most in touch with the "now" will be the most successful — whether library or bookseller. 